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Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 02518 01 OF 02 042018Z

73
ACTION OES-05

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 HEW-02 AID-05 IO-11 EB-07

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /044 W
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R 041838Z MAR 76
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2240

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SPOP, VE
SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF WORLDWIDE POPULATION GROWTH FOR
UNITED STATES SECURITY AND OVERSEAS INTERESTS.

REF: 75 STATE 301427, STATE 047640

SUMMARY: THE GOV HAS PROMISED THAT IT WILL MAKE FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ALL VENEZUELANS BY 1979 AND IT IS USING PART OF ITS PETROLEUM REVENUES TO FUND AN AMBITIOUS PROGRAM OF FAMILY PLANNING CLINIC EXPANSION. THE HEALTH MINISTRY AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR ARE AT LOGGERHEADS. GIVEN THE STRONG ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF VENEZUELA, RAPID POPULATION INCREASE IS EXPECTED TO HAVE A LIMITED SHORT OR MEDIUM TERM IMPACT ON THE NATION ALTHOUGH THE CURRENT RATE OF POPULATION INCREASE OF OVER 3 PERCENT A YEAR MUST BE CURTAILED TO INSURE LONG TERM PEACE AND PROSPERITY. END SUMMARY.

1. RESPONSES ARE KEYED TO QUESTIONS ASKED REFTEL A:

A. VENEZUELA HAS NO EXPLICIT OFFICIAL POPULATION POLICY NOR IS THERE ANY SIGN THAT ONE WILL BE ADOPTED. FAMILY PLANNING IS REGARDED AS AN INDIVIDUAL RIGHT AND AN INDIVIDUAL DECISION WHICH SHOULD BE MADE BY EACH MAN AND WOMAN WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF HIS OR HER OWN FAMILY AND ECONOMIC SITUATION AND DESIRES. TACITLY, THE GOV DOES EXPECT THAT INCREASED AVAILABILITY OF FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES WILL REDOUND TO THE PUBLIC BENEFIT BY
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PAGE 02 CARACA 02518 01 OF 02 042018Z

REDUCING SUCH SOCIAL PROBLEMS AS ILLEGITIMACY, FATHER-LESS

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

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FAMILIES, ABANDONED CHILDREN, ETC. WHILE THE GOV RECOGNIZES
THAT REALIZATION OF ITS GOAL TO MAKE FAMILY PLANNING SERIVCES
AVAILABLE TO ALL VENEZUELANS BY THE END OF THE CARLOS ANDRES
PEREZ ADMINISTRATION (MARCH 1979) WILL REDUCE
THE BIRTHRATE AND THUS SLOW DOWN POPULATION GROWTH, THIS IS NOT
AN OVERT GOAL OF THE PROGRAM NOR ITS PRINCIPAL EMPHASIS.
PRESIDENT PEREZ IS VERY FAVORABLY DISPOSED TOWARD FAMILY PLANNING,
CAMPAIGNED ON A PRO-FAMILY PLANNING PLATFORM, AND HAS LAUNCHED
AN AMBITIOUS GOVERNMENT PROGRAM OF CLINIC MULTIPLICATION AND
EXPANSION DESIGNED TO MAKE FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES READILY
AVAILABLE TO ALL VENEZUELANS. MANY OTHER IMPORTANT FIGURES
IN THE GOVERNING ACCION DEMOCRATICA (AD) PARTY ARE ALSO WELL
DISPOSED TOWARD FAMILY PLANNING. THE LEADING OPPOSITION
PARTY, THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS (COPEI) IS AMBIVALENT ABOUT FAMILY
PLANNING BECAUSE OF THE POSITION ADOPTED BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH. COPEI, AS A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, FAILED TO MAKE
ANY PROVISION FOR FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES DURING THE CATWERA

ADMINISTRATION (1967-1974), WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A SMALL GRANT
HIDDEN IN ANOTHER, UNRELATED, APPROPRIATION WHICH WAS FORCED
ON IT BY ITS AD PARTNERS IN THE CONGRESSIONAL COALITION.
THOSE THAT FAVOR A FULL RANGE OF FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES
HOPE THAT THE PROGRAM WILL BE SO DEEPLY ENTRENCHED IN THE HEALTH
MINISTRY'S CLINICS BY 1979 THAT EVEN IF COPEI IS VICTORIOUS IN
THE NEXT ELECTIONS IT WILL BE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO CURTAIL
THE GOVERNMENT FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM. A COPEI GOVERNMENT WOULD
CERTAINLY OPPOSE SUCH FAMILY PLANNING METHODS AS VOLUNTARY
STERILIZATION OR ABORTION, NEITHER OF WHICH ARE OVERTLY PRESENT
IN THE GOV PROGRAM NOW BEING IMPLEMENTED.

THE MAJOR PROBLEM FACING THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM IN VENEZUELA
TODAY IS A BITTER DISPUTE BETWEEN THE GOV FAMILY PLANNING APPARATUS
CENTERED IN THE HEALTH MINISTRY AND THE PRINCIPAL VOLUNTARY
ASSOCIATION (AVPF), WHICH OPERATED THE CLINICS PRIOR TO THE 1974
CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT. AVPF IS DEDICATING MOST OF ITS ENERGIES
TO TRYING TO ELIMINATE THE HEAD OF THE GOV PROGRAM. THE GOV
IN TURN IS UNWILLING TO CONTINUE ANY SORT OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
TO AVPF AND APPARENTLY FEELS THERE IS LITTLE OR NO ROLE FOR
PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS NOW THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN OVER THE
OLD PRIVATE PROGRAM. THE GOV EFFORT SUFFERS FROM THE USUAL
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PAGE 03 CARACA 02518 01 OF 02 042018Z

BUREAUCRATIC PROBLEMS OF A NEW, RAPIDLY EXPANDING PROGRAM, BUT
THERE SEEM TO BE NO INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES IN THIS AREA.

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 CARACAS 2518

THE ATTITUDE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TOWARD FAMILY PLANNING HAS LITTLE IMPACT ON THE GENERAL POPULATION AND THE CHURCH HIERARCHY IN VENEZUELA HAS NOT LENT ITSELF TO ATTACKS ON FAMILY PLANNING AND INDEED HAS BEEN QUITE COOPERATIVE. VENEZUELA IS A HIGHLY URBAN NATION (75 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION LIVES IN CITIES OR TOWNS) WITH A HIGH LITERACY RATE AND A GENERALLY EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM, ALL OF WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO A FAVORABLE ATMOSPHERE FOR FAMILY PLANNING EFFORTS.

B. THE GOV FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM IS STILL TOO NEW FOR A COMPETENT JUDGEMENT TO BE MADE ON ITS COST EFFECTIVENESS. 1975 WAS THE FIRST FULL YEAR FOR THE GOV-OPERATED PROGRAM. CURRENT GOV EMPHASIS IS ON EXPANDING THE NUMBER OF CLINICS AND THEIR GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME REPORTS OF A DECLINE IN CLINIC EFFECTIVENESS UNDER GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT AND THE GOV ITSELF ADMITS THAT THERE WERE SOME TRANSITION PROBLEMS ALTHOUGH IT NOW CLAIMS THESE ARE BEING SOLVED; THE U.S. GIVES MINIMAL AID TO VENEZUELAN POPULATION PROGRAMS SINCE THE GOV'S BUDGET RESOURCES ARE MUCH GREATER THAN THOSE OF MOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, MAKING COST EFFECTIVENESS LESS OF AN ISSUE HERE THAN IN MANY COUNTRIES.

C. A MODEL DEVELOPED BY THE INSTITUTO DE ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES ADMINISTRATIVOS IN COOPERATION WITH GENERAL ELECTRIC (GE TEMPO) AND FINANCED BY AID INDICATES THAT THE RAPID RATE OF POPULATION INCREASE WILL HAVE LITTLE SHORT OR MEDIUM TERM IMPACT ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. OBVIOUSLY IN THE LONG RUN EVEN A NATION AS WEALTHY
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AND AS RELATIVELY UNPOPULATED AS VENEZUELA IS LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM UNLIMITED POPULATION GROWTH.

D. VENEZUELA IS ALREADY AS URBAN AS THE U.S. SO FEW PEOPLE REMAIN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE TO SWELL THE CITIES. THE ECONOMY IS EXPANDING RAPIDLY, ABSORBING BOTH THE NATURAL INCREASE IN VENEZUELA'S POPULATION AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF IMMIGRANTS, LEGAL AND OTHERWISE. VENEZUELAN CITIES ARE HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME COPEING WITH THEIR RAPIDLY EXPANDING POPULATION, ESPECIALLY CARACAS. THE GOVERNMENT IS ATTEMPTING TO SEE THAT FUTURE EXPANSION TAKES PLACE IN SECONDARY CITIES AND IS INVOLVED IN ELABORATE PROGRAMS TO UPGRADE THE QUALITY OF RURAL LIFE, ALTHOUGH NO ONE REALLY BELIEVES THAT MANY CITY DWELLERS WILL RETURN TO THE COUNTRY.

E. VENEZUELA'S POPULATION GROWTH IS CONCENTRATED IN LARGE CITIES (INDEED MUCH OF THE COUNTRYSIDE HAS BEEN DEPOPULATED BY RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION) AND THUS THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT IS ALSO LARGELY AN URBAN PHENOMENON. THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN CARACAS (WHICH CONTAINS CLOSE TO ONE-QUARTER OF THE POPULATION) HAS BEEN DETERIORATING NOTICEABLY FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. AIR POLLUTION, NOISE POLLUTION, HORRENDOUS TRAFFIC JAMS, INADEQUATE GARBAGE COLLECTION, AND QUANTUM JUMPS IN POPULATION DENSITY IN THE NARROW VALLEY OF CARACAS ARE ALL CONTRIBUTING TO A DECLINE IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT. POORER NEIGHBORHOOD (CALLED RANCHOS) BUILT ON STEEP SLOPES OVERLOOKING THE CITY FREQUENTLY ARE THE SITES OF LANDSLIDE DURING THE RAINY SEASON WITH LARGE LOSSES OF LIFE AND PROPERTY. VENEZUELA IS JUST BECOMING CONCERNED WITH POLLUTION AND HAS DISCOVERED THAT MANY OF ITS RIVERS AND LAKES ARE BADLY POLLUTED.

F. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT POPULATION GROWTH IN VENEZUELA WILL HAVE ANY POLITICAL OR STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES IN THE SHORT OR MEDIUM TERM. VENEZUELA IS NEVERTHELESS CONCERNED BY THE IMPACT WHICH THE RAPID POPULATION GROWTH OF ITS NEIGHBORS IS HAVING ON THE COUNTRY. ITS BORDER REGIONS ARE SUBJECT TO LARGE-SCALE ILLEGAL IMMIGRERION FROM COLOMBIA AND TO A MUCH SMALLER EXTENT FROM BRAZIL.

G. U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION SUPPORT TO THE VENEZUELAN POPULATION PROGRAM SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE LIMITED TO TECHNICAL
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SERVICES AND MORAL SUPPORT. EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE TO ENCOURAGE VENEZUELA TO BECOME A DONOR TO THE WORLD POPULATION EFFORT IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF ECONOMIC AID IT IS MAKING AVAILABLE TO LESS FORTUNATE NATIONS BOTH BILATERALLY AND THROUGH SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS THE IBRD AND THE IDB.
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